

Researching ITM students ' attitudes of online classes amid Covid-19

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Abstract

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many Japanese universities, including Toyo University have been forced to take their English classes online. However, instead of classifying this type of educational delivery as online education, it has been referred to Emergency Remote Teaching, and is reactionary rather than planned in nature. Under these difficult circumstances, it is important to ensure both quality of education and student attitudes, so a 15-item survey looking at students' attitudes to those online classes, as well as provision and assessment of those classes was created. The results from first and second years (n= 576) in the Faculty of International Management show average levels of satisfaction and motivation with these classes and a need for more learner support. The author concludes with recommendations.

Introduction

As far back as the 1980s, foreign language educators began integrating electronic communication into their teaching (Warschauer, 1996). From there, a plethora of learning platforms of various kinds, as well as a whole body of research, has come to fruition. Whether used for distance learning, or combined with face-to-face classes through hybrid education, technology and language learning have made a lasting partnership.

Around ten years ago in Japan, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology created working groups which aimed to develop Japan's own ICT (Information and Communication Technology) plan. It was called "The Vision for ICT in Education," MEXT (2011) and was tasked with exploring ways of combining ICT into the Japanese education system by 2020. These changes were to apply to both inside and outside of classrooms in Japan.

Whatever the current pace of ICT in Japan, the recent and ongoing outbreak of Covid-19 from the start of 2020 has suddenly accelerated the need for online classes. With many schools and universities closing classroom-based classes in favor of online classes to avoid face-to-face contact and stem the flow of the pandemic, educators and universities are currently reacting in a number of different ways to this unprecedented situation.

There is a distinction made between online classes, which are part of an educational institutes teaching

arsenal and planned well in advance and this current reactionary movement to try and “get something done quickly.” The latter has been referred to as Emergency Remote Teaching (Hodge, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020). Due to its reactionary nature, it could be seen as inferior in some ways to its more proactive counterpart.

Whatever ways this teaching delivery has been named comes secondary to how students perceive the efficacy of this method. Despite universities offering some financial help with tuition fees, most universities are charging the same fee as they would have for student’s face-to-face education. Because of this, student perception and satisfaction become paramount. Universities still owe a level of care to the delivery of their education.

Currently students in Toyo University have joined the ranks of those students forced to take online classes. This short paper addresses attitudes of students in the International Tourism Faculty (ITM) to English education provided under the current Cov-19 situation.

Background

Although, as previously mentioned, some advocate for a clear distinction between online courses and Emergency Remote Teaching, it is worth exploring what research tells us about both of these types of online related instruction in order to find factors that may affect the attitudes learners have towards the current version of online teaching.

One of the first factors that could affect the way that students perceive the current online classes could be the stance teachers / institutions take towards grading students. In America, Stanger (2020) reports that some schools are changing the grading from grades such as A, B, C to a pass or fail grade. It may be appropriate in the current climate of uncertainty to favor students who are likely to have problems, e.g. those with internet problems and unable to take part in lessons. This could be more democratic, but could possibly reduce the incentive to work harder for students to make that extra effort to attain a higher grade.

Staying with internet capabilities, Education Week (2020) reports that one of the major challenges specified by teachers to teaching in the present situation at 48% is students may have a lack of technology to access classes. Incidentally, the top concern was realizing whether students are actually learning. In the traditional classroom, students’ physical proximity allows the teacher ease of clarifying when students don’t understand.

Further, it will depend on the teacher, and how much time or effort he or she puts into an individual class, which will affect attitudes. Milman (2020) points out that it is not the medium of delivery per se, but the design, quality of content and learner engagement that will make a difference. In Japanese universities, that could mean the distinction between full-time and part-time teachers. The latter often having less time to prepare classes because of a wider teaching burden at different institutions, leading to the possibility of having to familiarize oneself with more than one medium of online instruction.

Moving from factors affecting ERT, to those that are more in line with technology-driven classes. One

example is from Beaudoin, Kurtz and Eden (2009) who investigated critical success factors of 100 Japanese online learners in an ESL environment and found that self-motivation came out top at 86% followed by Ability to Express One's Ideas with Enjoying the challenge of learning and Familiarity with Technology scoring less than fifty percent. Thus, self-motivation, as is the case with most activities, needs to be established.

In EFL settings, Al-Jarf (2009) found that students did not take online instruction seriously, and believed such courses to be more for fun and not credit. Certainly in a country like Japan where games and social media is mainly accessed through phones, this situation may exist. The utility of phone use for online instruction may not be something students have really considered or been exposed to up to now.

At Japanese universities, researchers have found that students generally have a positive attitude towards online classes. Murakami (2016) states that universities may see them as a solution to dealing with apathy for English study among academically low-level students. In her conclusion, she lists the content and previous experience with online lesson platforms as success factors in the delivery of online classes.

Bray, Aoki and Dlugosh (2008) studied attitudes of Japanese learners towards online distance learning ($n = 424$), and found that personal convenience came out on top for critical success factors. Students under this current ERT situation do not have the luxury of this kind of situation as they have to take the classes, but that study's qualitative section identified motivation was also an important factor with this comment:

"It takes a strong motivation to stick to a study schedule, especially at home," (p.12).

ERT may also bring about this kind of reaction among learners.

Methods

In evaluating ERT, Hodge, Moore, Lockee, Trust, and Bond, 2020 believe that a comparison with face-to-face instruction has little value because the medium of information itself should not necessarily affect the teaching, and there too many variables affecting ERT for the results to have any meaning. They do advocate, however, for evaluations of content and products, the former being issues such as problems inherent in the ERT situation, and the latter being outcomes of the ERT. Thus, this study will address the attitudes of learners receiving instruction through ERT in the faculty of International Tourism Management related to perceived problems and learning outcomes.

The instrument used in this assessment of online classes was adapted from previous studies (Bray, Aoki & Dlugosh, 2008; Jung, Kudo & Choi, 2012, Acar, 2013 and Murakami, 2016). The survey consists of 15 items in three sections: attitudes towards online classes (6 items), perceptions of actual provision of online classes (6 items) and attitudes towards grading and assessment of the online classes (3 items). Each statement requires one of four levels of agreement (from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4)), with no middle option to stop students "sitting on the fence".

The original Japanese version of the survey can be seen in Appendix A. The items were created in English and were translated by the author and checked together with a Japanese colleague. The survey also includes informed consent stating that participation in the survey would not affect student grades and was optional in nature. The survey appeared on the school intranet from the end of June 2020, and was removed for analysis at the end of July 2020. A total of 576 students participated in the survey, of which 269 were first years and 307 were second years.

Results

The results showing average scores for first and second years can be seen in Table one and in the three sections within that survey. In the first section related to on-line attitudes, first and second years recorded similar tendencies, apart from question three asking if students would care to take online classes after the corona situation had eased. The first years were considerably less agreeable to this idea. This could be because they had not even studied on campus yet, and were anxious to do so. Generally, though, this result is a little disappointing if our faculty decided to move some of its classes online in the future. Looking at the remaining attitude questions, a picture of average class effectiveness, understanding of course goals and student motivation appears. There was a somewhat higher consensus of an ability to exchange opinions (question 5), which is fundamental to learning and increasing confidence among our students. In another study of Japanese students' attitudes to online learning (Beaudoin, Kurtz, Eden, 2009), an ability to express ideas was linked with increased motivation, so the more students have the opportunity to speak up and give opinions, the more motivating online classes could become. On top of that, there was an even higher score for students' displaying a serious attitude to classes (question 6), refuting previous researchers who had claimed that students see online classes as less serious, or even fun (Al-Jarf, 2009).

The next section deals with students' perceptions of how classes were physically managed. On the whole these results were similar for first and second years and are between average to good. From the students' perspective their Internet service was reasonable (question 9), and students' ability to get used to applications to take classes recorded a high score (question 11). This last score is promising if we consider that online classes were delivered with only the current Ace system, and the addition of either Webex Meetings or Zoom apps. This combination appears to have worked well for supplying lessons. Added to that, students felt less concerned about privacy issues (question 7), despite recent media reports of the instability and threats of using the Zoom software. That leaves questions 8, 10 and 12, which deal with support, explanation and preparation from the university to carry out online classes. Even with teachers being forced to, in some instances, having to completely rethink teaching practices, the results are somewhat above average. However, if online technology is to be used again in the future, or the current Corona situation continues, it is clear that better support systems surrounding the classes are needed.

The last section deals with grading and assessment, and again, first and second years show similar

levels of agreement. There is slightly above average agreement for requiring different assessment criteria for online classes (question 13), and below average disagreement for only providing pass or fail grades (question 14). These tendencies seem to again reiterate that students have been serious in taking part in classes, and have not been necessarily dissuaded by being online. This result seems to go against a recent result along online learners in America by Stanger (2020). However, all students strongly agree that teachers need to be kinder about grading students in this current situation.

Table 1 *Results of online survey*

Attitude towards the on-line classes		1st year (n=173)	2nd year (n=255)
1	I was able to learn English effectively through online classes this spring semester	2.49	2.49
2	I was motivated to study English through the online classes this spring semester	2.40	2.69
3	After the current Corona virus situation eases, I would still like to take English classes online in the future.	1.99	2.46
4	It is difficult to understand the goals of my courses this semester	2.51	2.43
5	Through online classes, I was able to exchange opinions / ideas with other students	2.53	2.69
6	I had a serious attitude when studying in online classes this semester	3.16	3.16
Actual provision of online classes			
7	I was concerned about privacy issues during online classes for the spring semester	2.13	2.00
8	The university provided adequate preparation / explanation for using online classes this semester	2.51	2.56
9	The Internet service I used enabled me to successfully take part in classes	2.98	2.99
10	The university's / teacher's Internet service was adequate for me to participate successfully in online classes	2.78	2.72
11	I was able to get used to using the technology / apps for online classes this spring semester	3.33	3.16
12	The teacher provided adequate preparation / support for using online his / her online classes this semester	2.80	2.85
Grading and assessment of online classes			
13	Online classes require a different kind of assessment to face-to-face classes	2.66	2.53
14	Rather than the S,A,B,C grades, evaluation for courses this spring semester should be only pass or fail	2.31	2.38
15	Teachers should be kinder than grading normal classes when grading students for online classes this semester	3.32	3.25

There are many possible factors that need to be taken into consideration when grading, such as students' internet service, which is known can be inadequate (question 9) and importantly, students' never having taken online classes, or being taught by teachers that have potentially never taught online classes. All of these could possibly negatively affect students' perceptions of the online classes.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to measure attitudes towards the delivery of online English classes at ITM in the face of Covid-19 pandemic. The results showed that generally there were no real clear differences between the first and second years surveyed. Basically students are serious about taking these classes and seemingly want to do well under those conditions, but student motivation is somewhat of an issue. Thus; attention to quality of delivery is vital in any facet of online education (Milman, 2020).

Motivation itself is a multifaceted construct, and can have many causes, but clearly better delivered courses would be one way of developing student motivation. Dornier and Cziser (1998) suggest ten ways to increase student motivation, of which one is increasing self-confidence; not related to one's actual ability but to the perception of how one performs. This can be done by creating language output opportunities for students to exchange their opinions and ideas in class, something that is very easy to do through learner platforms like Zoom, and should be one essential element in any language course (Nation, 2007).

Further, it is clear that support needs to be provided to not only students but also teachers using the online delivery system. For many of the part-time teachers in the ITM faculty at Toyo, it may have been their first time to actually use the university's learner management systems, like Ace. Particularly for part-time teachers, it is important for full-time teachers to give assistance with using the systems as well as help with preparing materials, which can also take a lot of time. If teachers are more knowledgeable about teaching online, this can be imparted to students learning online.

Instead of being classified as online education, the term Emergency Remote Teaching should be favored (Hodge, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020). This implies that the current way of delivery tends to be reactionary and, unsurprisingly, chaotic in nature. Indeed, to fully create an effective online education program in terms of planning, preparation, and development time, six to nine months is necessary (Means, Bakia, & Murphy, 2014). After the six months of the spring semester has finished, consolidation needs to take place because it is unlikely that that many universities, including Toyo, will be in a position to offer full time face-to-face classes anytime soon.

The faculty and its teachers need to also consider blended learning, which is a combination of face-to-face classes and online education, with students having control over variables like place and time. This has been successful in universities in Japan to date, and could be one way to deliver successful English education (Acar, 2013). It is clear that the Covid-19 situation has created many problem, but could also be seen as a chance to rethink how English education can be delivered more effectively and in tune with student needs.

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Appendix A Online survey used for this study

	1 全くそう思わない 2 あまりそう思わない 3 そう思う 4 とてもそう思う
春学期の英語の非対面授業に対するあなたの意見	
1	非対面授業を通して自分は英語を効果的に学ぶことができた
2	非対面授業に対して自分はやる気をもてた
3	現在のコロナ問題が解決されても将来は非対面授業をまたいつか履修したい
4	今学期のコース目標が分かりづらかったと思った
5	非対面授業を通してほかの学生と意見交換が出来た
6	非対面授業に対して、真剣に取り組んだ
春学期の英語の非対面授業に対する物理的な条件	
7	非対面授業に関するサイバープライバシーが気になった
8	非対面授業を実行させるために大学から十分なサポート体制があった
9	非対面授業に参加するため自分のインターネット環境は適切だった
10	非対面授業に参加するため大学のオンライン教育システムは十分整っていた
11	非対面授業用のテクノロジーやアプリケーションの使用に慣れることができた
12	非対面授業に参加するために英語担当教員から十分なサポート体制を得られた
英語の非対面評価法に対するあなたの考え	
13	対面授業と違って今回のオンライン授業は別の学生の評価が必要だと思う
14	通常通りの S,A,B,C 評価より、今回のオンライン授業に対して学生の評価は合格／不合格 (PASS / FAIL) だけで評価されるべきだ
15	担当の教員は学生を評価するときに対面の授業の時より大目に見て評価するべきだと思う

コロナウィルス禍におけるオンライン授業に対する 東洋大学国際観光学部生の態度の調査について

ロブソン、グライアム

[要旨]

コロナウィルスのパンデミックにより、東洋大学を含む多くのわが国の大学では英語のオンライン授業を行うことが余儀なくされている。しかしながら、このようなオンライン授業は、緊急避難的措置であり、事前に計画された授業とは異なっている。このような状況下で、教育の質と学生の態度について検討することは重要であると考えられる。15 項目の質問項目が学生のオンライン授業に対する態度や授業の評価を調査するために開発された。国際観光学部の第 1 学年および第 2 学年の調査結果は、平均的にオンライン授業に満足し、動機付けも低くないことが示された。また、オンライン授業にはさらなるサポートが必要であることがわかった。最後に調査結果を基にオンライン授業に対する提案を行った。